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SUBJECT: LEBANON: IRAQI REFUGEES RECEIVE BADLY NEEDED USG
FUNDED ASSISTANCE

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) The topic of USG assistance to the Iraqi refugee community arose in Poloff's March 18 meeting with Catholic Relief Service's (CRS) Country Director Melinda Burell. Burell said CRS, in conjunction with its local partner Caritas Lebanon, was working with Iraqi refugees by providing medical, humanitarian, and legal services. Burell also provided information on recent trends within the Iraqi refugee community as well as some of CSR's future projects in Lebanon. End Summary.

CRS HELPS IRAQI REFUGEES IN LEBANON

2. (SBU) In a March 18 meeting with Poloff, CRS Country Director Melinda Burell described CRS's achievements with the \$750,000 grant from the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM). Burell said CRS, by working in conjunction with its local partner Caritas Lebanon, has helped 1,500 Iraqi children with their educational needs by purchasing their books, enrolling them in schools, and even paying from some to go to private schools if the public ones are sub-standard. CRS has also enrolled 200 to 300 young Iraqis in vocational training programs.

3. (SBU) CRS assisted 750 Iraqi refugees by providing them medical care, in addition to providing over 2,000 Iraqi families with humanitarian assistance by giving them family food packages and coupons for grocery stores, according to Burell. Caritas provides counseling to Iraqi refugees and assists with legal services to help undocumented migrants obtain legal status by working with Lebanon's immigration agency, Securite General, to obtain a general amnesty for all illegal Iraqi refugees residing in Lebanon.

MIGRANTS' CENTER KEY TO SUCCESS

4. (SBU) CRS has been able to provide the majority of these services to the Iraqi refugee community through Caritas's owned and operated Migrants' Center. Most of the Iraqi

refugees live integrated within the Lebanese community, but they come to Caritas' Migrants' Center for services and assistance. Burell said Caritas was a great partner and has even used some of its own funding to assist some Iraqis with their legal cases.

¶15. (SBU) The Migrant's Center is composed mostly of refugees, migrants, and some trafficking victims. The population living at the center and using the center's services is mostly Sudanese, Philippine, Ethiopian, and some Palestinians. However, now Iraqi refugees are on the verge of becoming the largest community benefiting from the center and its services, according to Burell. CRS and Caritas officials also visit Iraqi families in their homes, as well.

TRENDS WITHIN THE IRAQI REFUGEE COMMUNITY

¶16. (SBU) Burell said Iraqi Christians were the original community of Iraqi refugees immigrating to Lebanon, but now recent arrivals are Shias and Sunnis. Most Iraqi refugees reside in areas based on the confessional make up of the Lebanese village or city, according to Burell. Many Iraqis do not want to return to Iraq, Burell added.

¶17. (SBU) Burell noted that, in the beginning more affluent Iraqi refugees were coming to Lebanon, but now poorer Iraqi families are also making the journey. Burell mentioned that many Iraqi children have problems assimilating in local Lebanese schools. Burell added that many Iraqi refugees are experiencing employment challenges and that Caritas has had to increase its counseling services to help deal with the trauma many experienced before arriving to Lebanon.

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¶18. (SBU) However, Burell notes that the numbers of arrivals per day have decreased from the rate of about 100 per day in 2003, to around 12 to 15 a day, which was what the rate was before Operation Iraqi Freedom began in 2003. Deportations are also down, Burell noted.

POSSIBLE BACKLASH FROM LEBANESE COMMUNITY

¶19. (SBU) According to Burell, there is fear that there could be a backlash from the Lebanese population towards the Iraqi refugee community, though it has yet to happen. Burell said its current grant does not provide assistance to host communities, but noted that PRM recently sent out a Request for Applications (RFA) for programs directed towards the Iraqi refugee community. Burell proposes to use ten percent of this potential \$750,000 grant towards programs for the Lebanese communities, in order to reduce any potential tension between the local Lebanese populace and the newly arrived Iraqi refugees.

OTHER ASSISTANCE TO IRAQI REFUGEES

¶10. (SBU) In addition to this grant, Burell said PRM provided a one-year \$1.1 million grant to International Medical Corporation (IMC) in December 2007, to provide medical services, mostly psychological therapy, to Iraqi refugees in Lebanon. In addition, as part of a \$1,000,000 grant from PRM, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) allocated \$100,000 to educate and train Lebanese immigration and security officials about deterring the potential trafficking of Iraqi refugees in Lebanon.

COMMENT

¶11. (SBU) In our view, CRS and Caritas Lebanon have been good partners on assisting the Iraqi refugee community in Lebanon. We favor their proposed approach of directing some assistance to head off resentment in the Lebanese communities where the Iraqi refugees live. End Comment.
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